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SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

STATE OF VERMONT,

OCTOBER 15, 1858,

BY C. A. THOMAS, D. D.,

OF BRANDON, VT.

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Resolved, *by the Senate and House of Representatives*, That the thanks of the General Assembly be tendered to the Rev. C. A. Thomas, D. D., for the Election Sermon, and that the Secretary of State be directed to request a copy of said Sermon for the press, and to cause eleven hundred copies of said Sermon, when procured, to be printed for the use of the General Assembly and the State Library.

In House of Representatives, Oct. 16, 1858.

Read and adopted.

L. G. HINCKLEY, *Ass't Clerk.*

In Senate, Oct. 16, 1858.

Read and adopted in concurrence.

H. E. MINER, *Ass't Secretary.*

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SERMON.

QUIT YOU LIKE MEN.—1 Cor. 16: 13.

Our text, although given at first to a little band of Christians at Corinth, may be of use to all men. Mankind are addressed in the Scriptures as responsible agents, and on account of their duties and difficulties, are exhorted to acquit themselves like men. Since God has endowed us with rational and moral powers, it should be considered our highest honor and greatest privilege to be obedient to Him, and useful to mankind. Every one of us has duties to God and his fellow men, and whether we act by ourselves or with others, there is much for us to consider and do.

To acquit ourselves like men, let us keep in mind our origin and dignity as *men*. God, at the beginning, breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor." It is said, too, that God created man in His own image. Now God is a spirit, with knowledge, reason, and affection, some likeness to which is found in ourselves. His infinite superiority and perfection, in these respects over us, do not destroy the likeness. And this likeness to God, in the intellectual and moral faculties of our souls, although marred, debased, and, in some of its parts, obliterated by sin, is *not lost*, so that man has become irresponsible

for his character and conduct. As we read the instructions of Christ, we find no abatement of man's responsibility on account of his depravity. The fact that God exists, and that we are a portion of his rational and accountable creatures, greatly enhances the value of our existence. Let every one, then, consider his high origin and true dignity, and acquit himself like a man.

In order to be true men, we must take hold of correct principles, and be steadfast in maintaining them.

We have ample means for obtaining a knowledge of the fundamental principles of morality and religion: and these principles are the basis of all true manly character and conduct. The human mind itself suggests the idea of a moral lawgiver over the mind, as conscience is found accusing or else excusing us for our acts. The material world around us contains manifold evidences of the wisdom, power and goodness of the great original Architect, which we do well to heed. But the Bible especially reveals the great principles of morality and religion, which we all should regard. It lays open the character of God as holy, and our own characters as sinful, and how we may be forgiven, purified and saved. Some persons turn away from all moral and religious belief, as of no importance; but let them consider that the rejection of sound moral and religious principles, leaves destitute man's higher nature—the soul; as much as to stand aloof from wholesome food, would leave famishing our lower nature—the body. Near our text is found the injunction, "stand fast in the faith." The faith here means, the great principles of truth and righteousness—the principles of morality and religion found in the Gospel.

The foundation of a good, manly character, consists in a supreme regard to the will of God, and a benevolent regard to the interests of mankind; and that we may know how to render supreme homage to God, and to conduct benevolently towards men,

let us turn often to the decalogue of the Old Testament, and to the plain precepts of our Savior in the New, for these are adapted to all men in all ages, and ever remain perfect and imperishable.

Take for example that great practical and plain precept of our Savior, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Here is a precept based on the general brotherhood and mutual obligation of mankind. It is addressed to men—creatures of understanding and affection, who have a common origin and a common nature, "born to an inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Notwithstanding the great difference in the capacities, characters and conditions of men, yet, considered as men, they share in the same common nature, and are responsible to the same great Lawgiver; they are, therefore, so far equal, and, in the same circumstances, entitled to the same treatment. How plain, too, is the precept! A person of the weakest understanding may easily perceive its meaning. It is an appeal to each one's self as to how he would be treated, that he may know how to treat others. By making such rules of conduct our own, we shall show ourselves to be upright, stable, useful men.

To acquit ourselves like men, we must be found manfully contending against what is injurious and wrong.

Life is a warfare—a continual warfare. The great opposing principles of holiness and sin, right and wrong, are ever in conflict; and all persons, as soon as they know the difference between what is right and wrong, are responsible agents in this battle. A slight acquaintance with ourselves will show the importance of being on our guard against our own wrong tendencies. We are constituted with appetites, and there is often a conflict between the dictates of our better judgment and the leadings of appetite. When our appetites are controlled and gratified in accordance with the requirements of God, and the dictates of our judgment, then they conduce to our usefulness

and happiness; but when they lead the way, and become clamorous and mutinous, then we are rendered unprofitable and wretched. We are to be vigilant and decided in controlling our appetites, and checking our wrong tendencies. We are to "eat and drink in order to live, not to live in order to eat and drink." Bodily appetite, in its artificial state and exorbitant demand, is a powerful enemy. It does not belong to the original constitution of the body, but is found generated and stimulated by fond indulgence and excessive gratification, so that the mind is brought into captivity to the body. A morbid condition of our bodily appetites is a great impediment to the development of a manly character.

Our selfish impulses, too, may be mentioned as ever struggling for the mastery over our benevolent ones. Debased as man is by sin, he is not without some appreciation of benevolence, and some condemnation of selfishness. Every person, not wholly blinded and hardened by sin, is exercised with some benevolent promptings, in distinction from his selfish ones. Every man knows that he ought so to live in this world as to honor God, and be of some use to others, as well as to himself. But when one's own *little self* is so magnified as to fill all the space due to God and his fellow-men, then is he divested of all true manliness of character. A man who is wholly devoted to his own personal gratification and emolument, *is not a man.*

And in respect to all those who duly control their appetites, and successfully overcome their besetting sins, it will be manifest, that they have still more to encounter. The warfare of the present state extends beyond the sphere of one's personal condition, and contemplates the great conflict between truth, righteousness and God on one side, and error, sin and the devil on the other; and how this conflict rises in magnitude and importance, as the forces on both sides are brought into collision, and are seen opening the way for the salvation or the ruin of mankind! In

coming to this great conflict, let us see to it, that we enlist on the right side, and put on the armor furnished us by the Captain of our Salvation; for, with the girdle of truth, the shield of faith, and the breastplate of righteousness, united with vigilance and prayer, we shall conquer.

"A christian is the highest style of *man*:
And is there, who the blessed cross wipes off,
As a foul blot from his dishonor'd brow?
If angels tremble, 'tis at such a sight."

To acquit ourselves like men, we must be strong and resolute. The strength here inculcated is not so much physical or intellectual strength as moral. Some persons are naturally of stronger physical and intellectual powers than others, which constitute a foundation for greater efficiency of character. And the same person has not the same efficiency at all times. He may be deprived of it by sickness, or infirmity, or some other cause. "It is surprising," says John Foster, "to observe what a resolute spirit will accomplish sometimes in a bad cause; and always interesting to contemplate what a resolute spirit may effect in a good cause." Let a person be conscious of the goodness of his designs, and the uprightness of his motives, and he will be inspired with true moral courage to surmount difficulty and endure hardship in his endeavors to attain his object. And what if a person be destitute of wealth and learning: yet if he have some moral worth, with a heart to do and suffer the will of God, let him be courageous and cheerful. Feeble means are sometimes used and blessed in bringing about great and good results. Many a man, feeble in his own estimation, yet strong in God, will be found, in the end, to have done much good. The performance of our duties and the endurance of our trials stand connected with difficulties. It is difficult to overcome the depravity of the heart, which, more or less, stands in the way of all our duties. It is difficult to overcome that inordinate worldliness which meets us continually on our pathway in life, and without strength and res-

oluteness, in connection with divine aid, we shall fail to overcome the obstacles in the way of our duty, and to acquit ourselves like men.

To be true and profitable as men, we must have in exercise a benevolent heart.

In close connection with our text is the important injunction, "Let all things be done with charity;" that is, with love. There are some men of good principles, sound judgment, and moral courage, who are greatly lacking in the manifestation of a benevolent spirit. They are stern and repulsive, and hence fail to attract and benefit, as they otherwise might do. On the other hand, there are some persons of so bland a temper and flexible a disposition, that they are readily led to fall in with the opinions and manners of others, without considering whether they would be beneficial or injurious, right or wrong. Such laxness, as this, is not to be cherished by a truly benevolent spirit, and is incompatible with genuine manliness.

All our fellow-men, good and bad, friends and foes, are to be regarded with the love of benevolence, or good-will. This does not imply that we are to regard all men, good and bad, friends and foes, with the same feelings of approbation and satisfaction. God does not regard all men with approbation; but he regards them all with benevolence or good-will. Hence the thrilling declaration, "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life." Now, as any of mankind repent of their sins, believe in Christ, and live a useful life, they are regarded by God, not merely with the love of benevolence or good-will, but with the love of approbation and delight. So we, in our love to our fellow-men, should exercise good-will to all, to our enemies, if we have any, and to all mankind; while the love of approbation should be superadded to all who do right and exhibit any moral excellence. Of course, in the exercise of our

love, supreme excellence is to be loved supremely. We are to love God according to His greatness and goodness, and consequently more than all created things. And in respect to mankind, while all should have our benevolent regard and hearty good-will, those alone, who love and practice righteousness, should have our approval and esteem. He who is destitute of a benevolent heart, lacks the most essential characteristic of a true man. What can one enjoy or do aright, without a heart expanded, elevated and purified by love to God and his neighbor? What can be done to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim the vicious, and to help to usefulness and heaven, where there is no genuine good-will to attract, sustain, and bless? All our efforts to benefit others must be characterized by fidelity and love, if we would be successful.

My remarks, thus far, have had respect mainly to men as to their separate conditions, duties, and characters. And this is important, since the community, the Legislature, the Church, or whatever be the compact, is made up of individuals. Let all acquit themselves, as good and useful members of their respective compacts, and we shall have all these compacts what they ought to be, effective in promoting what is right, and in suppressing what is wrong.

It may now be expected, and it will, I doubt not, be deemed proper, that after saying something pertaining to man, as an individual, something be said bearing on his associative condition and duty. We have only to open our eyes upon the condition of mankind in this world, to see the desirableness and the necessity of having civil organizations and religious institutions. Our circumstances of dependence and want, together with our rational, social and active nature, make these organizations and institutions indispensable. A civil organization, or government of the right kind, has for its object the liberty, safety, usefulness and happiness of those under its jurisdiction. And surely every

christian association, called a church, while it has for its object the spiritual and everlasting good of its members and others, should not be lacking in a deep and wakeful interest in what pertains to their temporal welfare. A church may have a sound creed, but what is that creed worth, without active goodness manifested in a consistent, useful life?

The Legislature may enact good laws, but what of these laws, if there be wanting, on the part of the people, intellectual perception and moral worth sufficient to understand and obey them? Is it not the duty, then, of the Legislature, if they would acquit themselves like men, to have not only good laws, but to adopt such measures, and use such means, as will lead the inhabitants to appreciate and regard the laws? Whatever, then, may tend to the intellectual and moral improvement of the people, has a strong claim upon *your* prompt and candid attention. And do not, in your deliberations, be indifferent to the welfare of the rising generation of Vermont. May this class, by proper intellectual and moral culture, with habits of industry, economy and usefulness, be prepared to benefit the state, the country, and the world.

And as our state government is associated with the general government of the country, how important that this state, and every other, in the confederacy, use their influence to remove the evils which prevail in the land.

The aborigines of this country are not only neglected, but much abused. I am aware that Congress takes a little oversight, and makes a small appropriation annually, for the benefit of the Indians within our borders. Still, they are sadly neglected, and shamefully treated. In 1855, treaties were made with some sixteen tribes, within the Oregon and Washington territories, by which they ceded to the United States over sixty-two million acres of land, for which they were to receive an equivalent in cash and other things. But, it is said that these treaties have been neg-

lected, while the white settlers have been constantly taking possession of the land, thus depriving the Indians of their home.

Some of the Indians on our western frontier are subjected to great injustice and outrage. They have been defrauded by government agents, and made drunk by whiskey dealers. Wars with them have been commenced and prosecuted for purposes of speculation ;—wars which have cost our government already millions of dollars ;—wars so unprovoked and cruel, that a reliable military commander denounces them as a scandal to our government and people.

May not something be done to awaken more interest in the public mind, in behalf of the Indian race, that they may be protected from the fraudulent trader and the brutal assaulter: and may not Congress be petitioned to adopt some plan, by which they may have suitable and ample territory, "with all the necessary facilities of a true, progressive civilization" ?

But while the condition of the Indian race may be a reproach to us, as a nation, the condition of the African race must be regarded a still greater reproach. American slavery, I am free to say, does violence to the spirit of the age, is opposed to our natural sense of justice, and contravenes some of the plainest precepts of christianity.

The pro-slavery tendencies and achievements of the government of this country, for the last forty years, should lead us to humble ourselves before God, and to acquit ourselves like men in arresting these tendencies and preventing further achievements. From the adoption of the Missouri compromise in 1820, to the present time, there has been concession after concession to the slave power, so that now, we have about three hundred thousand men towering above twenty-five millions, and the whole government called on from time to time to aid this small minority. Now, while so much is being done to perpetuate and extend slavery—when stratagem and bribery are abroad to impair the in-

fluence of the free States in favor of freedom—let all of us be united firmly and fearlessly in behalf of righteousness and freedom throughout the land, and to acquit ourselves like men.

We want more leading men of the right stamp,—men of moral worth and power,—men of intellectual strength and pure patriotism—who will utter their convictions with plainness and act upon them with consisteney.

Ministers of the gospel, in their public instructions, should make prominent the great conservative principles of good government. With political expedients and secular schemes, with revenues and partizanships, as such, they have nothing to do; but with justice and honor, righteousness and freedom, the principles on which all good government rests, they have much to do. If the Legislature of the State, or the Congress of the United States, disregard the great moral and christian principles which lie at the foundation of all good government, why should they not be rebuked and called on to repent?

The word of God is full of instruction to every civil government. It is constantly proclaiming the principles of truth and righteousness, saying "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." It is continually announcing the consequences of obedience and disobedience, saying to every nation and community, "Behold, I have set before you the blessing and the curse, life and death, therefore choose life, that you may live;" while, with a voice of thunder, it declares to the principalities and powers of earth, "the nation that will not serve the Lord shall perish."

And what is the instruction of the Most High to our nation? It is that we bow to His sceptre, and take heed to mould our laws and regulate our ways by the precepts of the gospel. Under the influence of love to God, and our neighbor, we are to go forth to our work, and acquit ourselves like men. The value of life consists very much in our disposition and endeavor to be

useful. Men are not to be esteemed so much for the talents they possess, as for the good use they make of them. And let us bear in mind that our life here must soon close. It is said of Philip king of Macedon, that he directed one of his attendants to come every morning to his chamber, and cry aloud, "Philip, remember thou art mortal." We are allowed but a little season in this world; and when we subtract the imbecility of childhood, the dotage of old age, and our periods of sleep and sickness from our brief term of life here, how little is left for doing and getting good, even if we live to be old!

As we consider the conditions and duties of men, both in their individual and collective capacity, how important that all be active, faithful, and useful! Let us all then awake to consideration, and be found, in our different stations and conditions in life, acquitting ourselves like men.

May the General Assembly of the State of Vermont,—the chief magistrate and subordinate officers, with the senators and representatives, now convened,—look well to the commonwealth, that it receive no detriment; and in all your responsible work, with due regard to God and mankind, "Quit *you* like men;" and at last, receive the plaudit of Heaven: "Well done, good and faithful servants." Amen.